

*Government Orders*

Historically, what set Micmac villages apart from others was the fact that lodgings often housed one or more families and were located by the water. The significance of this bill's impact comes from the fact that the Pictou Landing reserve was located by the water, which is essential. Naturally, all that has happened over the course of the last three decades has had a direct impact on Micmacs' lifestyle. I felt that this needed to be pointed out.

The Micmac Nation is a nation who was much affected by the arrival of Europeans. A population decline ensued. In the early days of the colony, there were about 50,000 Micmacs, as compared to a mere 10,000 registered Micmacs today. Some kind of socio-cultural conflict arose also because, for the Micmac Nation as for other aboriginal nations, exposure to the European culture did not always prove beneficial.

Socio-cultural shocks have led this nation, and others, into dire poverty. Even during British rule, efforts were made to turn Micmacs into farmers but, given their traditional way of life, these efforts failed of course. Integration attempts continued, with Micmacs being sent out to work on the railway and in logging. Finally, you realize that these people were really sincere in the importance they accorded to their culture, a culture that has not only lived on to this day but is still highly valued, while all integration attempts have failed.

• (1130)

Therefore, I felt it was important to present this short scenario, because the bill relates to a Micmac nation, the Pictou Landing community, which has always lived close to water. This bill deals with a specific body of water, the Boat Harbour.

The problem started when the Scott Maritimes Limited Pulp and Paper Mills settled at Abercrombie Point. As we know, pulp and paper companies tend to pollute the environment. As well, the protection of the environment was not seen as vital then as it is now. The priority was to create jobs in an area largely covered with forests. In fact, that is where the bulk of wood harvesting took place.

However, in 1965, the provincial government decided to build a waste treatment plant after realizing that the company was polluting the water. It was thought to be a good idea to set up a treatment plant to try to solve the problem. I say "to try to solve" because, as I will show in the next few minutes, that attempt unfortunately failed, with the result that lots of contaminants ended up in the water.

That plant, which was built to treat the water coming from the pulp and paper mill, created a body of water covering several acres, in the vicinity of the reserve, and even on reserve land. From the very beginning, there was a lack of movement on the government's part regarding the cleaning up of this environmental catastrophe. This is deplorable. For two decades, from 1965 to 1985, the Micmac tried to come to an amicable settlement

with the federal government, which is responsible for native issues, and also with the Province of Nova Scotia, which has jurisdiction over the environment.

For almost 20 years, the Micmac tried to reach some agreement. Because nothing was being done, they finally decided, in 1986, to sue the government.

In this area, the environment has reached the critical stage in terms of its deterioration. According to some information, the level of pollution is such that it has been blamed for a number of deaths on the reserve.

Through an agreement in principle, the government proposed a financial out-of-court settlement to the Pictou Landing Indian band. That agreement in principle was reached in December 1992 and ratified in July 1993. It is a compensation agreement intended to settle out of court a suit brought by the Micmac in 1986.

The bill may look like a minor piece of legislation. There are only four clauses. Consequently, one might think that it does not deal with a complex issue. However, I know from experience that the number of clauses is no indication of how complex a piece of legislation can be. That bill may have only four clauses, but the last one refers to a specific agreement which, as I will show in a minute, is flawed in many ways. Although the bill does have some merits, as the hon. member pointed out. For instance, the money to be paid will not be money as provided under the Indian Act, which means that the community will be able to spend it as it sees fit.

This is probably one of the few positive factors I found in the bill. If we refer to the agreement as such, and there is a reference to the agreement in clause 4, we realize that it does not really deal with the environmental problem. And I am not so sure that we are doing the Pictou Landing First Nation a big favour.

Clause 4 of the bill, where we find the reference to section 13 of the agreement, mentions a compensation account. In the event of legal proceedings in the days and months to come, claims may only be made against this compensation account.

• (1135)

We in the Bloc Québécois considered trying to help those who did not waive their rights, because, as I will explain later on, the people who use this compensation fund waive their right to sue the federal government, and in return, the government gives them \$35 million, and I will give you a breakdown of this amount later on. In any case, at first we had some questions about section 13, because some people had not waived their rights.

What happens to those people? I will expand on this later on, but before I go any further, I would also like to thank my colleagues on the standing committee who agreed to adjourn so I